

# DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION OF A PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Highlights of Group Discussions

### 1. What is a good working definition of the term “public affairs”?

Public affairs involves problems and issues which affect groups of people, require intelligent bases for decision making, and usually call for action by one or more of the various levels of government. The solution of problems involves a knowledge of alternatives and the consequences of the alternatives. For example, an explanation of the feed grain law after enactment is information on farm management—not public affairs.

Public affairs issues may be placed in two categories:

- a. Those which will be resolved through government decision-making processes.
- b. Those which may be acted upon without changes in the local regulations or state or federal laws.

Identifying public affairs issues requires perceptive analysis of the future if the extension worker is to provide leadership and not be continuously “putting out brush fires.”

### 2. Should the job of public affairs education be done differently with a small staff than with a large one?

No. The basic methodology of effective education is not related to staff size. A small staff may have difficulty in developing competence and executing programs on as wide a range of issues as a larger staff.

### 3. How narrowly should we define policy problems for educational work?

Policy problems for educational efforts should be defined so that they may be handled in a reasonable time period, be of interest to the audience, and be suited to the audience's level of competence. For example, the farm problem might be general to a diverse interest group, but should be narrowed to the farm income problem to a highly specialized interest group.

### 4. How do we decide what public affairs issues to emphasize?

The potential breadth of public affairs as a subject matter area requires that the specialist establish priorities and adjust his educa-

tional effort to a manageable number of issues. Some criteria by which such priorities may be established are listed below.

- a. Is the timing appropriate for educational work on the issue? In some cases, educational work can be effective in creating awareness of an emerging policy issue; in others, emphasis may be placed on an understanding of the consequences of alternative solutions to a well-known problem. In order to obtain the highest returns from educational inputs, efforts should be timed with a public interest when educational activities can make a constructive contribution.
- b. Is the staff competent to make an educational contribution on the issue? Total university resources should be considered rather than solely the training and experience of the extension specialist. Where an issue is of sufficient importance, study of the problem area by the staff to gain the needed competence may be worth while.
- c. Is the issue specific enough to capture the interest of people? That is, educational work should be directed toward issues that are meaningful to the public.